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# ‘Safe places in domestic spaces: two-year-olds at play in their homes’

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## Abstract

This paper contributes to the growing research literature on children’s ‘intimate geographies’ by focusing on two-year-old children’s explorations and play within the domestic spaces of their homes. It draws on video data showing three young girls playing in selected home spaces i.e. a family grocery shop in Peru, the upstairs rooms of a house in America, and the balcony of an apartment in Italy. Through analysis of short video sequences the paper describes the way children use and invest meaning in these spaces. It is argued that the three domestic locations can be seen as ‘safe places’, in both material and personal senses; and that they enable children’s sense of belonging, foster their ‘emplaced knowledge’ and build on their confidence to explore spaces further afield.

**Key words:** play, domestic spaces, video data, children’s place-making

## Introduction

Home is where one starts from. As we grow older  
The world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated.

(Eliot, 1974, East Coker, p. 190)

### *A 'Day in the Life' study*

'A Day in the Life' has, to date, studied seven two-year-old girls living in Canada, Italy, Peru, USA, Turkey, the UK and Thailand respectively (see Gillen et al., 2007 in press; Pinto, 2006). As an interpretive study it pursues aspects of the 'meaning of human action in cultural context' (Gaskins et al., 1992, p. 6). At the core of the methodology each child is filmed for one day, ideally from the time she awakes to the time she goes to sleep in the evening. (In practice this length of time was not feasible in each family location, and interruptions were accommodated for ethical reasons e.g. toilet periods and, of course, any other the family desired.). In each location at least six hours of film was obtained from the 'Day'. There was also an earlier pilot visit when families experienced how it would be to have two researchers and a camera with them on the actual Day.

At this stage in our ongoing collection of data for the project, we have decided to focus just on girls because we were mindful of their under-representation in historical accounts of childhood (see, for instance Cunningham, 2006). Furthermore, our interpretive approach does not aim to, or indeed is suited for, the comparison of 'variables' as understood traditionally, and gender frequently remains a dichotomizing dimension in many studies.

A central investigative aim of 'Day in the Life' is to develop an understanding of what a 'strong child' might mean for each of the filmed families and how such a notion itself may be culturally constructed, assuming that underlying values and ways of expressing them will differ across communities. We take our starting point for this concept from a UK project 'Birth to Three Matters' that became government policy (see Abbott and Langston, 2004; SureStart, DfES, 2005). This initiative suggests 'strong' children are self assured, have a sense of belonging, and need to feel

acknowledged and affirmed. From the beginning, our desire has been to interrogate this notion across cultures as clearly there will be cultural differences with regard to which aspects of children's rearing and development are most valued. Related ideas like 'growing up well', 'thriving', 'being sturdy' and 'showing resilience' were found to be useful in terms of our discussions with carers and understanding their wishes for their children.

An iterative stage of data collection was also significant for us in our endeavours to reach interpretive understandings of the children's lives in context, 'addressing the gaps between the researcher's perspectives and those of a study's participants' (Graue and Walsh, 1995, p. 144). Following a day's filming, compilation videos of around 30 minutes were put together for each of the seven children. These contained five or six short sequences from each child's day selected on the basis that they had potential to contribute to a dialogue between parents and researchers on understandings of a 'strong child' or near-equivalent notions. Parents and children from each family were shown their child's compilation and their reactions and comments were filmed and thus themselves became a source of data (see Gillen et al, 2007 in press, for further methodological details).

Studies of very young children in their own homes using video have become less unusual but seem relatively rarely to take place over the course of a whole day or more. Part of the process of selecting participants to work with entailed finding children and families who were personally positive about this way of working and who were willing to tolerate such a degree of researcher presence. The period of pilot filming ensured that the child was not made unhappy by the process (and indeed in two initial locations where we had a slight sense of difficulty we disengaged the project). Ethical issues were discussed with the families, and permission given for academic dissemination of the results. In fact, it was own sense of current academic standards (rather than the families' feelings) that prompted us to make images of children indistinct or otherwise anonymise all reproductions of our data.

Our datasets, of 'strong' and 'thriving' children (as conceptualized in non-identical, but probably overlapping systems of values) demonstrated manifest signs of children playing, enjoying and exploring in their homes that we wished to explore further. In

working in this way, we do not claim that our data is in any sense 'representative'. The children in our project are located in diverse global communities, however, this does not mean we are setting up any claims to universality. We heed the encouragement of Holt and Holloway (2006, p. 139) to 'reconnect understandings of the socio-spatial constructions of childhoods within heterogeneous contexts, with the differentiations that dissect children, and connect children variously to adults.'

### *The focus of this paper*

This paper draws on the wider Day in the Life study and focuses on three of the seven children included to date i.e. 'Katy' (pseudonym) from a small, rural, Midwestern city in America, 'Beatrice' from a large northern city in Italy, and 'Lina' from a small mountain village in Peru. We present three short video sequences that show these children relating to and using specific domestic spaces for the purposes of their play, and establishing places which appear special to them. We might have selected sequences from any of our study's seven children as they all provide data relevant to our focus. However, we felt these three children sufficiently illustrate, in their various ways, the issues we seek to address. We are particularly influenced by the argument of Horton and Kraftl (2006) that much of what happens in life goes unnoticed so they urge children's geographers to be sensitive to 'everydayness' (p. 71).

### *Homes*

Homes are highly varied places. They can be very simple in design and construction or they can be elaborate. Some people, through adversity or even choice, become 'homeless' but they invariably seek spaces that become meaningful places to them. These might include hide-a-ways, corners and niches where they feel sufficiently safe as bases and sleeping places. 'Home' argues Creswell (2004, p. 24) 'is an exemplary kind of place where people feel a sense of attachment and rootedness'. Some homes, for a variety of economic, social and psychological reasons, may not always supply this for family members and, at worst, may lead to developmental impairments and diverse psychological impairments (see, for instance, Wolfe, 2006). We should therefore be cautious about romanticising 'home' for children when for many it may be a place from which temporary or lasting escape is desired.

For thriving children in the early years of life, however, home can be seen as the initial place of attachment and a private place that they first explore and get to know – ‘a physical location, a physical space where children centre themselves’ (Christensen et al., 2000, p. 144). Outside areas that are closely linked to homes – gardens, yards, compounds and balconies – can also become part of a child’s ‘intimate geography’ (Philo, 2000). However, the extent to which young children might become familiar with their home and its nearby spaces will vary considerably according to the location of their community in place and time (Karsten, 2005). As a place for material safety, personal growth and the beginning of social and cultural understandings, as T.S Eliot reminds us in our opening quote, home may for many be a prime starting place, but the permeation of the ‘world’ into the home has many, potentially complex effects (see, again, Karsten, 2005).

### *Safety in homes*

Carers of very young children are understandably concerned with their physical safety and, in comparison with the outside world, family homes, as constructed environments, could be seen across our data to provide spaces that are relatively safe. However, homes, like many places in our lives, are not risk free and parents often intervene to prevent injury. They need, however, to balance socialization of children towards an awareness of injury risk with encouragement of autonomy in diverse ways. This will also be according to their perceptions of children’s developmental level, hazards and attitudes towards gender (see Morrongiello & Dawber, 1999) as well as, we would suggest, a regard for practices prevalent in their community. Total elimination of risk (if ever possible) might result in loss of interest for children and an over-dependency on adult judgement. Harden (2000, p. 47) suggests that children, as they go about their play, stand to benefit personally ‘if they are engaged in a reflexive monitoring of risk’. During our filming, all three of the children in focus had freedom of movement within their homes but they were never far from visual and/or aural contact with their carers. There were, of course, also two researchers following them throughout the day. There was thus a very high adult presence, although it was our impression that the children were nevertheless able, for much of the day, to pursue their own play interests.

### *The three homes in focus*

Given that they span three locations across the world, the three homes we consider here reveal important differences in terms of home lay-out and the nature of their domestic spaces i.e. a family compound, including a grocery shop (Peru), a three bedroom house (America), and a small, second floor apartment (Italy). There were also, understandably, differences in parenting styles, and the definition and management of risk on a child's behalf. The provision of safe physical spaces within a home appears very important for the development of a 'strong child' but, agreeing with Harden above, it also seems desirable that growing children should experience some risks within the relative safety of their homes. Fry (1987) uses the notion of 'safe space'. This, he suggests, is a vital human need which he defines as a special quality of an environment in which people can feel at ease, secure and able to function well. For him, safe space therefore has interpersonal and psychological dimensions as well as referring to a safe physical environment. We return to this theme in our discussion section.

The events we described below are not 'unusual' in any specific aspect when considered against the background of the 'Days' in general. It would have been very possible to select events that are 'similar' by any specific criteria. However, close description of any part of the girls' 'Days' always, of course, reveals unique details (see Horton and Kraftl, 2006).

### **Video sequences**

We next describe short sequences of video data from the filmed days of Lina near the counter in a family shop in Peru, Beatrice on the balcony of an apartment in Italy, and Katy using a corridor to move between two rooms in a house in America. Our selection of sequences is guided by a wish to show the children's 'place-making' (Creswell, 2004), and the way they confidently and imaginatively (as 'strong children' might) use domestic spaces in their play.

(a) The gate

*(Peru, late morning, 11.17 – 11.24) (7 mins 20 secs)*

Lina's father carries her from her bedroom, where she has had breakfast, across a central yard to the adjoined family grocery shop. Whilst in her bedroom she had been dancing on her bed to taped music. She had been holding a white balloon attached to a stick, and also a yellow toy dog. The balloon had become detached in the bedroom,, however, she continues to hold the stick, deriving pleasure from wiggling and waving it.

On the way she greets her cousin and kisses her mother who is baking bread. Once her father has put her down, she confidently makes her way through the shop to a low wooden gate placed between the counter and a pillar. Her parents have put the gate there to prevent her going around into the serving area. She places the toy dog on a small ledge on the other side of the gate but continues to hold and wave the stick. Her father asks Lina's six year old cousin to watch over her. Lina squats down in a corner (formed by the pillar and the gate) and plays with the stick's rubbery attachment which earlier held the balloon.

Figure 1



Safely held by a known corner, Lina explores the end of her balloon stick.

'Conscious of being at peace in one's corner produces a sense of immobility, and this, in turn, radiates immobility.' (Bachelard, 1994, p. 137)

Lina leaves this corner and moves between the stacks of drinks and food, tapping a shelf with her stick. She then returns to the gate. This time, however, she positions



herself in the opposite corner formed by the junction of the gate and the counter. Her parents and older sister are nearby, working in the shop. Her mother appears with a long baking tray and large loaf of freshly baked bread. Lina moves out from her corner in order to watch her mother and then returns to the first corner, selects a magazine from the ledge and gives it to one of the researchers. Her mother passes by and Lina calls, 'Mama, ancash' (requesting a mandarin) which her mother gets for her from one of the shelves. Lina returns to the gate, positions the balloon stick on the ledge and starts to peel the mandarin, carefully placing its peel on the ledge.

Figure 2



The configuration of objects – ledge, gate and corner - appear to serve Lina as a 'work space' and this is a part of her ongoing attachment.

Occasionally she looks out over the shop as she eats. After a short while Lina leans against the gate but instinctively shuffles towards her right, locating herself in the corner formed by pillar and gate. With the corner supporting her body weight she crosses her legs as she eats the fruit. Sometimes, as though to signify her containment and relaxed posture, she wiggles her right foot, the one that is not bearing her weight.

Figure 3



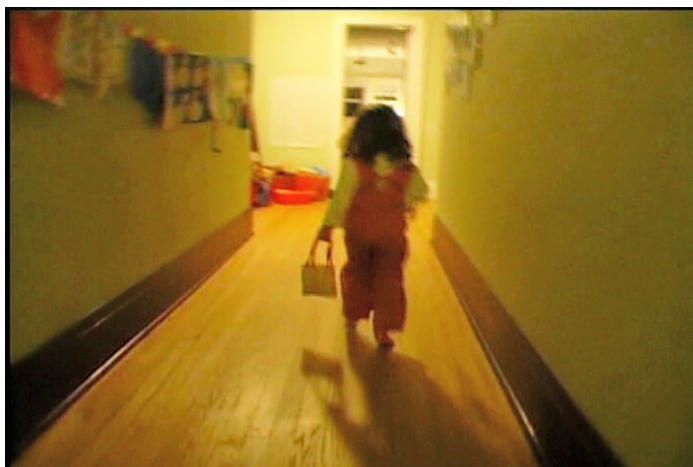
At her most relaxed and contained - Lina seems to be building up 'intimate relationships with the material, personal and social spaces in which she lives' (see Fry, 1987, p. 14)

(b) The corridor

*(America, early evening, 18.58 – 19.03) (5 mins 28 secs)*

Whilst in her bedroom, Katy and her father have been talking about her 'half birthday', her cake and the candles. She announces that she needs to rock her baby to sleep and sing her a lullaby. He father encourages her to sing but she pauses for a moment and then says, 'I need to go to work.' She picks up a purse and says 'Bye' to her father and makes off down a corridor (about 6 metres long) which connects to the playroom.

Figure 4



Off to work with a purse full of crayons. A corridor is a connecting route way – a space that facilitates a journey, even an adventure.

Once at the playroom she picks up a second purse and carries both purses back down the corridor to her bedroom. Her father follows. On arrival at the bedroom she turns around and goes back along the corridor to the playroom and her father says, 'What's the plan, Katy?' She says nothing but when she gets to the playroom she picks up some pencils and puts them in one of the purses. She then asks her father to hold a purse. He asks her what it contains. She explains that it's her work but he suggests it's not time for work it's time for bed. He asks her if she wants to read 'Go Dog Go'. As he speaks she continues to put some pencils into one of the purses and then asks for his help to do this. She then goes back down the corridor with one purse and her father follows with the other. Part way down she turns around as though to go back to the playroom but meets her father who is closely behind her. He gives her the other purse and they both return to the bedroom. He suggests she can play a little longer once changed into her pyjamas.

When changed she picks up a ball and wants to play with it but her father suggests she puts it into her crib for her dolly, which she does. She tries to climb into the crib but decides to get her toy stroller. She gets it into a position ready to go, finds a baby doll and carefully puts it in.

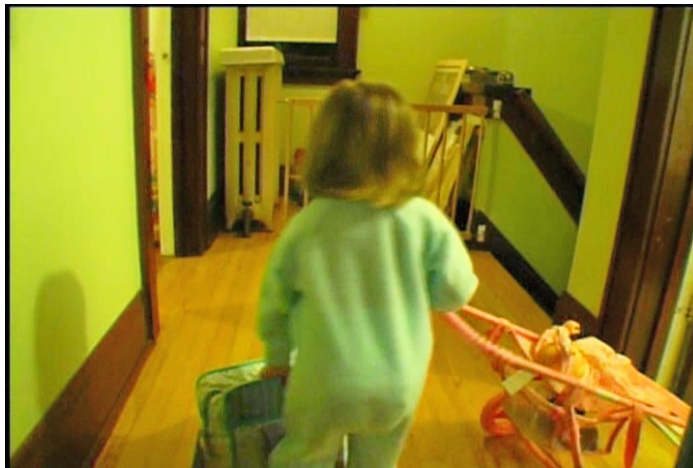
Figure 5



It seems that the baby is about to be taken on the same journey that Katy herself made before getting ready for bed. Home experiences help her to gain 'the maturity to handle more complex environments and ways of knowing' (Aitken, 2001, p. 5)

She walks the baby and stroller along the corridor to the playroom, passing her brother coming the other way. As before, her father follows behind. It's not clear whether or not this is a continuation of the earlier 'going to work' play. Once in the playroom, however, she picks up a large bag of crayons (filled by her earlier in the evening). She then pushes the stroller with the baby back along the corridor at the same time, and with some difficulty, carrying the large bag back towards the bedroom. Her father stands in the corridor watching, wishing to understand. As she proceeds along the corridor she drops the heavy bag and decides to drag it and the stroller for the final few feet to the bedroom. Once there her father puts the bag and stroller to one side and Katy voluntarily sits on her bed ready for a story.

Figure 6



There's a determination to bring the bag and stroller along the corridor and back to the bedroom. Success in achieving this seems to be part of the satisfactory completion of the journey to and from work.

(c) The balcony

*(Italy, after lunch, 12.26 – 12.35) (9 mins)*

Beatrice's father helps her get down from the kitchen table where she has been having her lunch. Once down, he takes off her bib and straightaway she collects a red plastic chair and - partly pushing, partly carrying - moves it, unassisted, to the outside balcony area which adjoins the kitchen. She places this chair next to a low seat which

is already on the balcony. She then picks up her large life-size baby doll ('Coccolone') and places her on the red plastic chair.

Figure 7



Initiating play on the balcony by putting Coccolone in a carefully positioned chair. 'Play is the active exploration of individual and social imaginaries, built up in the spaces of everyday life.' (Aitken, 2001, p. 176)

She sits next to the doll on the low seat. Both Beatrice and Coccolone are facing the kitchen doorway where her parents are standing and watching. Smiling, Beatrice shuffles in her low seat to establish a suitable position and then pulls the red chair and doll closer to her side. She says 'Nice to meet you' and holds the doll's hand. She is aware of the video camera at this point. Her mother stimulates her play in a background way suggesting that Beatrice and her doll may need to have a nappy change. Beatrice declines. Again she takes Coccolone's hand and repeatedly kisses the doll's cheek. Realising that her own seat has moved a little away from the balcony railings, she stands and pushes it back to locate and better secure it.



Figure 8



Beatrice takes considerable care positioning and arranging objects on the balcony. Cresswell (2004, p. 2) writing of the way in which spaces become personalised, states: 'Thus space is turned into place. Your place.'

Although her engagement with the camera is apparent at times, she shows a contentedness and pleasure at being on the balcony with Coccolone. Sometimes, she chuckles and rocks on her seat showing satisfaction. Again she shakes the doll's hand and stands up and kisses her on the cheek. Positioning herself correctly on her seat seems an important part of the play and her close relationship with Coccolone. Her mother comes onto the balcony and shakes Beatrice's hand as in a game. 'Nice to meet you, 'Girolamo Pompetti', she says to her daughter and Beatrice repeats this with her mother and then with Coccolone. The mother stands up, but Beatrice calls her and puts her own hand near Coccolone's mouth. Her mother asks if her daughter is feeding the doll and if she needs a bib. Suitably prompted, Beatrice fetches the bib from the kitchen and tries to put it on her doll. This is difficult because Coccolone's head is positioned back in the chair and the bib gets caught on the doll's ear. Her mother helps by lifting Coccolone out of the chair so that Beatrice can put on the bib. Beatrice then feeds the doll with the spoon, taking food from a small bowl.

Figure 9



A very low seat may not be the most convenient place from which to feed Cocolone. However, this is Beatrice's preferred way. There's an attentiveness to be observed which may arise from the sensitive attention provided to Beatrice by her parents when she is given her lunch. 'I am the space where I am.' (Noël Arnaud, quoted in Bachelard, 1994, p. 137)

Beatrice eats too. She cleans the doll's mouth with a napkin. Then she finishes what's left and, licking and sucking the spoon, leaves the balcony and goes back into the apartment.

## Discussion

We identify three themes arising from the above sequences i.e. the children's wish to play, their 'embodied' explorations, and their use of 'safe space'.

### (a) The wish to play

Although it is sometimes not that obvious, we feel that all three children are much immersed in play in the selected video sequences. Both Katy and Beatrice are primarily involved in easily observed symbolic and dramatic play pursuits. Katy has a wish to go to work. For her, this involves movement between two familiar rooms along a corridor. She believes, probably from observing her parents, that going to work involves a journey and also carrying things to the work place. However, the contents of her two purses and the larger bag seemed determined by an earlier play involvement which involved filling bags with crayons - a different imaginative

pursuit, or maybe one with a work focus too. This concentrated filling of bags, in which each and every one of a set of fifty or more crayons was earlier transported from one container to another, seemed to be an ‘intense interest’ (see DeLoache and Asmussen, 1990) carried through the day to a bedtime ‘going to work’ finale. Truly, this is a bringing to life of Paley’s (2004) eponymous observation of ‘A child’s work: the importance of fantasy play’.

With regard to Beatrice’s balcony play with Coccolone, we know from her parents that this has a history. The balcony is a space that she routinely uses, sometimes with her doll when she’s finished eating, but also for water and small world play, for instance. In our selected sequence the balcony also provides a supplementary lunch-time area where she enacts what has just happened to her by feeding her a baby herself. Her sense of how she wants things to be arranged in this space is apparent and this seems suggestive of ‘early home making’ (see Hart, 1979). Her feelings of achievement and happiness are very visibly expressed and there’s a ‘soothing’ dimension to getting things as she wants them (see Cameron et al., 2006).

In the sequence showing Lina, play is less easily observed but it is nevertheless to be identified. For instance, as we have said, she holds her toy dog and plays with her balloon stick as she is carried from her bedroom. Indeed, she is very attached to the stick which seems to serve her as a valued play possession – a ‘talisman’ (see Freud, 1965) or a ‘transitional’ play object (see Winnicott, 1982). She appears ‘playful’ as she greets family members on her way to the shop. She enjoys exploring the shop once there, and she further investigates and plays with her balloon stick when located near the gate. Maybe too, she is playing when she offers a researcher a magazine from her own ‘mini’ shop. Her intricate finessed handling of the mandarin is repeated throughout the day in her play, often with small objects as they are arranged, changed or rearranged, always with great care, seeming to us to mirror the precise tidy arrangements of objects on shelves in the shop.

It appeared, therefore, that all three children were playing, or wishing to play, throughout much of the above sequences and, moreover, throughout the days when we filmed them. This conclusion was not reached without some thought on our part. As early childhood researchers and educationalists we came to our study with a



confidence at both understanding and recognising young children's play. However, the opportunity to examine and re-examine video data led us to reconsider our own established mindsets about play. We concluded that the studied children were involved in play in rooted and very extensive ways - much more, in fact, than we might have anticipated.

Sometimes this strong sense of intent was interrupted when carers involved their children in some kind of routine domestic activity like getting dressed or undressed, or eating a family meal. We saw this to be part of the process of being drawn into the 'collectivity' of home and the 'tangle of conventions' that need to be introduced to children (see Douglas, 1991, p. 302). However, when free from such adult demands, a spontaneous and absorbed way of living which is best described as play seemed to be each child's preferred way of being. We also noticed how interactions between carers and children (and siblings) could, of course, provide stimulus to play, and also how children could productively draw family members into their play. Even when responding to adult wishes, children seemed able to find ways of building in something exploratory or play-like for themselves – see, for instance, Gillen and Hancock (2006) with regard to children's impact upon family eating occasions.

So, for our three children exploration and play seemed to be deeply embedded in their daily lives in both easily seen and also more subtle ways. From our observations, the children showed developed abilities at moving in and out of their preferred play worlds when adults required their attention and co-operation. We therefore relate to Winnicott (1982, p.48) who writes:

‘...*it is play that is the universal*, and that belongs to health: playing facilitates growth and therefore health;’ [italics as in original]

And here, Winnicott was referring to adults as well as children.

In terms of children's use of our three identified domestic spaces, it was play that guided their explorations and their engagements; and it was play that enabled them to rehearse their 'use and mastering of place' (Christensen, 2003, p. 15).

(b) Embodied explorations

Immersion in play as a form of living was often accompanied by an active use of the body during play when the children explored spaces and became involved with home artefacts. Winnicott (1982) captures some of what we observed in our video data when he writes:

‘To control what is outside one has to *do* things, not simply to think or to wish, and *doing things takes time*. Playing is doing.’

(p. 47) [italics as in original]

Watching Lina, Beatrice and Katy led us to the conclusion that they were often employing their bodies in total ways in order, it seemed, to fully experience spaces for themselves. Their shufflings, swayings, anglings, twistings, reachings and positionings seemed inextricably part of their play behaviour. Their corporeal, embodied explorations appeared important to the effectiveness of their engagements with space, but seemed to provide the fun of exercise too. In this respect, Ward (1978) believes children’s play carries with it a form of training in motor skills and sensory awareness. We certainly noted the children’s pleasure as their bodies encountered different kinds of space – Katy scampers excitedly along the corridor with her purse, for instance, and Lina clearly enjoys a relaxed position as she eats a mandarin. Children’s bodies do appear more visibly active and re-active than adult bodies and they often display what adults may see as impetuosity - sometimes regarded unimaginatively as ‘fidgiting’. Ellsworth (2005), writing of the relationship between place, experience and the body, expresses a concern about an over-emphasis on learning through the mind and highlights the importance of ‘non- and pre-linguistic’ ways of making sense of the world. She concludes, ‘to inhabit a body is to be continuously and radically in relation with the world, with others, and with what we make of them’ (p.4).

All three children use their bodies to explore and relate to domestic spaces in ways that seem to guide and inform their pursuits, enhance their understandings, and increase their sense of belonging. Much therefore appears to stem from their bodily ‘emplacement’ and this leads Chistensen (2003, p.15) to refer to the importance of

children's personalised 'emplaced knowledge' which can, she claims, be compared with the abstract or formal knowledge that adults tend to emphasise.

(c) Safe space

Following Fry (1987) and the concept of 'safe space', the three children in this paper can be seen to be immersed in 'safe places' within their respective domestic settings. These are places where they might feel they can explore and roam with some freedom while carers can feel sufficiently confident that their children are safely located. Trust, which is important to children's environmental experiences, risk taking, and personal growth, are thus extended by carers to their children. So, we would argue that the way in which the children 'are' in their locations indicates that they feel sufficiently safe – materially and psychologically – to behave in ways that are important to their development and well-being.

In addition to being physically safe, Lina, Beatrice and Katy can be seen to have a degree of independence from their carers, although supervision is always near by. In this respect, Halldén (2003), writing on children's views of family, home and house, writes: 'Children are dependent, but they also create an autonomy within the frames set by parents' (pp. 32-33). Our children are much younger, but we felt this could be said of them even though they were quite closely monitored. This is helped by their seeming ability to live in the moment and forget the adults who are watching them. The children's rapid acceptance of two researchers tracking them with a camera through a day is testimony of their ability to make light of surveillance and get on with the business of their lives (also noted by Shaffer, 1993, cited in Woodhead and Faulkner, 2000, pp. 15-16).

For Lina, the gate – a boundary marker with a nearby convenient ledge and two corners - appears to provide a safe base, even a 'nest' (see Bachelard, 1994) - from which she sometimes ventures out into the public space of the shop. However, she can always return and attend to her own 'embedded' interests. One of these is simply watching the happenings in the shop, especially given its interesting location at the border of domestic and public. Tuan (1974) writing on environmental perception, notes the way in which children, with time on their hands, can be very open to the

world. For Lina, there's a lot of shop-related life that is of not entirely predictable and therefore of interest so her place of observation seems to have taken on a particular strategic importance. It's a significantly personalised place which as 'her place' may give a sense of separation from her carers.

The balcony, which blurs the boundary between indoors and outdoors, also offers Beatrice scope for some separation from adults. Its connection with the kitchen, yet location in the open air, may enable her to feel almost alone at times even though her parents are at the same time, perhaps reassuringly, close by. The balcony is a self-contained 'micro-place' which, through Beatrice's play, appears to have become layered with place-making associations. Ward (1978) in his study of children living in cities notes their tendency to 'colonise small spaces'; Beatrice seems to be very much at home on the balcony.

For Katy, the corridor is also somewhere where she might conceivably experience a feeling of independence - where she can be a little 'away' from the immediate oversight of her carers. On this occasion, however, her father and two researchers are always close by. The brief corridor encounter with her brother, as she hastens along to work, probably contributes to the feeling of a journey. It adds to the sense that this is a busy route way and a 'processual path' (Ellsworth, 2005, p.6) – a slightly anonymous space where people can pass each other when on the way to somewhere else.

Thus, in addition to being materially safe places, following Winnicott (1982), we suggests that the gate, the balcony and the corridor can be seen to offer the studied children 'transitional spaces' which enable 'playing in time and space' (p. 47) – a potential psychological space between children and their carers.

## **Conclusion**

We make three points by way of a conclusion. Firstly, our study of these three young girls reveals to us the significance of their homes in terms of providing them with safe opportunities for play, the development of their emplaced knowledge, and the shaping of their confidence to freely explore, and give meaning to, intimate domestic spaces.

There is a sense too in which they themselves, through furnishing their world with artefacts, enable a space to be safe for their play – Lina’s stick, for instance, allows a distanced touching of the world, and Katy’s stroller supports hurried movement. As a place for children’s development and learning, home does receive attention in the literature. However, maybe there is a need to give more acknowledgement to the rich opportunities that home can provide as a ‘safe playground’; and particularly the way in which even young children, through their own agency and play, orchestrate personal experiences and learning.

Secondly, with regard to the children moving outwards from their homes to explore the ‘stranger’ and ‘more complicated’ world to which T.S. Elliot refers. We believe the studied children are preparing themselves for this - in both their embodied explorations and also the building of their related emplaced knowledge. Bachelard (1994) suggests house can be seen as our ‘first universe’ and that ‘all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home’ (p.5). Our analysis leads us to think that the children in focus know a lot about place-making within their homes - Lina in the context of operating from a safe base in a family grocery shop, Beatrice in terms of imaginatively furnishing and using a balcony, and Katy with regard to the creative use of a corridor with its two linked rooms. There is much evidence to suggest the children are actively ‘integrating an understanding of spatiality’ (see Massey, 2004, p. 1) into their home lives and this can be seen to feed into our project’s notion of a ‘strong child’. In terms of Karsten's (2005) thoughtful study of children's occupancy and agency in outside spaces as opposed to inside home spaces, we can identify with the suggestion that former dichotomies may be breaking down, with consequences for children’s exploratory activities. The exploration of how 'outside' spaces and activities are sometimes brought inside the home, and vice versa, could be a direction for our future research.

Finally, for us as researchers, the fine grain analysis of a relatively small amount of video data (i.e. 21 minutes and 28 seconds in total) serves to remind us of how much was going on in the home lives of three young children in a very short space of time. Whilst not wishing to make excessive claims for the virtues of video data, and acknowledging that this paper has not had the scope to properly examine its

difficulties and constraints, we will boldly assert that we find some support for the suggestion by (Jacobs et al, 1999, pp. 720-721) that this form of data is:

‘... much more versatile than other forms of data and can be viewed by researchers from diverse backgrounds and disciplines, who might bring fresh perspectives to the data analyses.’

In this study, video has assisted us to heed the exhortation by Horton and Kraftl (2006) to examine the detail of ‘everyday practices’ including the little things that may not be seen by some observers as significant. We have given attention to, and drawn significance from, three children’s practices in three distinct domestic spaces. This has reminded us of the way in which we, as adults, may perhaps be out of touch with how children perceive and relate to spaces. In this respect Aitken (2001) writes, ‘Children see things in environments that we may have forgotten how to see, let only understand’ (p. 8). It has therefore been instructive to re-engage with the way children from three diverse settings explore the geography that is closest to them, and how play is fundamental to their creation of meaningful places.

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